

Leading lights in science stand tall in Melbourne

Embargoed – 6pm AEST Monday 9 November 2015

Eight of the brightest young researchers will be recognised with prestigious Young Tall Poppy Science Awards at a ceremony at Swinburne University.

These winners showcase the diversity of research being carried out in this state. From predicting the severity of droughts to developing better medical diagnostic kits, the scale of which ranges from ultra-thin to influencing our whole society. The outcomes of these Tall Poppy's research will stretch far beyond Victoria.

The Tall Poppy awards are run by the Australian Institute of Policy and Science (AIPS) to honour up-and-coming scientists who combine world-class research with a passionate commitment to communicating science. The awards are held on a state by state basis to celebrate researchers across science, engineering and mathematics.

"Many Young Tall Poppies go on to achieve even greater things and to become inspiring leaders in their field," she said. "They also become role models by working with the education and community sectors to encourage greater engagement in science." said AIPS General Manager, Ms Camille Thomson.

As part of the Young Tall Poppy campaign, award winners will spend a year sharing their knowledge with school students, teachers and the broader community through workshops, seminars and public lectures.

Young Tall Poppies are nominated by their peers and are early career researchers who have under ten years post-doctoral experience. Selection is based on research achievement and leadership potential. Over 500 young scientists have been honoured nationally since the awards were established in 2000.

Event details:

Date: Monday, 9 November 2015

Time: 6.00-8pm

Venue: Advanced Manufacturing and Design Centre, Swinburne University

The AIPS is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that works to promote excellence in research and innovation, increase public engagement in science and inform and influence policymaking.

For media enquiries and further background on winners, please contact:

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Winners Bios follow...



Dr. Ailie Gallant
Monash University
Research Field: Climatology

Dr. Gallant's research aims to better understand droughts by looking at how the atmosphere, oceans and the land work, by themselves and together, and investigates how these can lead to decades with more droughts, longer droughts or more severe droughts. By identifying the processes that lead to droughts, we can better predict and prepare for droughts as well as reveal a clearer picture of how human-induced climate change might affect droughts in the future.

Dr. Elisha Riggs
Murdoch Children's Research Institute
Research field: Public Health

Dr. Riggs' program for refugee and migrant health research has grown to span multiple health sectors including dental, maternal and child health and maternity services. Many healthcare services are not equipped to respond to the diverse cultural and language needs of refugees. Elisha's research aims to support decision making about government policies, program design and service delivery.

Dr. Misty Jenkins
Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
Research Field: Immunology

Dr. Jenkins' work focuses on the area of cytotoxic T lymphocyte biology and she has made a number of critical discoveries on how the immune system controls cancer and rids us of malignant cells. She uses highly innovative live cell imaging and confocal microscopy to define how the immune system rids the body of virus infected or transformed target cells.

Dr. Pascal Molenberghs
Monash University
Research Field: Psychology

Our brain as the most complex of human organs, but it is only when things go wrong - for example, as a result of a brain injury - that we appreciate the magic of our brain and what it does for us. Dr Molenberghs uses brain-imaging methods, to study the "social brain" and how it can fail in patients with brain injuries. By learning more about the underlying neural causes, he hopes to ultimately guide new strategies for improved social functioning after brain injury.

Dr. Qiaoliang Bao
Monash University
Research Field: Optical Nano-Materials

Dr. Bao is developing ultra-thin materials and semi-transparent devices that will have the ability to harvest solar power, detect and tune light, and display pictures. Qiaoliang has recently discovered a new approach to grow ultra-thin materials on flexible glass on a large scale, and developed cutting-edge technology to tailor it into functional devices. These new technologies will bring the smart window a step closer to our lives.

Dr. Suresh Mathivanan



La Trobe University
Research Field: Cancer Biology

As part of Dr. Mathivanan's research he is developing medical kits where small amounts of blood samples from individuals can be used to test whether a person has cancer, particularly colorectal cancer. By discovering new ways for the early detection of colorectal cancer, the patient survival rates can be significantly improved and the human and financial burden can be reduced.

Dr. Tamsyn Van Rheenen
University of Melbourne
Research Field: Clinical Neuropsychology and Neuroscience

Dr. Van Rheenen's research is focused on understanding the characteristics of bipolar disorder. Using a combination of research techniques that measure brain activity, behaviour and the influence of genes she can investigate the underlying causes; whether they are heritable and how they influence the everyday functioning of people with bipolar disorder

Dr. Tracy Heng
Monash University
Research Field: Immunology

The immune system is crucial for protecting us from infections, but in older people, the immune system's ability to fight off infection weakens with age. This weakening occurs as a result of T cells undergoing changes that make them less able to recognise and attack invading germs. Dr. Heng's research has revealed that certain hormones have negative effects on the thymus and on T cell function: by removing or blocking these hormones, we can restore the immune defences of older individuals.

